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Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable KEN SALAZAR, a Senator from the State of Colorado.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Lord God, at a time when people expect much from their leaders, give these public servants the wisdom to do the work of legislation, administration, and justice for the common good. When criticism comes from those who expect miracles and look for weakness, give to the Members of the Senate, their families, and staffs the grace of patience and love. Help them to be compassionate and forgiving toward the critics who would tear down and destroy. Give them courage to live above hostility and to be faithful to their tasks when circumstances are discouraging and negative. Lord, brace them in Your strength against the enervating effects of frustration and futility as You infuse them with confidence in Your providential power. Bless them, Lord, with love, laughter, and life. We offer this prayer in the spirit of Him who came to set us free. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable KEN SALAZAR led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. BYRD).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, November 15, 2007.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable KEN SALAZAR, a Senator from the State of Colorado, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. SALAZAR thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The Republican leader is recognized.

VETERANS SPENDING

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, if the majority leader is not coming out, I will use a little of my leader time.

Americans were shocked earlier this year to learn about the conditions at Walter Reed Medical Center, and Members of Congress were right to seize the moment by pledging to veterans they would do everything they could to give them what they need. As Speaker PELOSI put it, in the military, we always say: In battle, we will never leave a soldier in the battlefield; and we say when they come home, we will not abandon them, so we should have the best possible opportunities for them when they do come home.

The veterans spending bill gave Speaker PELOSI and the rest of the Democrats in Congress an opportunity to make good on that pledge. So far, that opportunity has been squandered. The veterans bill was ready more than 2 months ago. It had overwhelming bipartisan support in both Chambers. The House version passed in June by a vote of 409 to 2, the Senate version passed in September by a vote of 92 to 1, and the President has been ready to

sign it for weeks. What is the holdup? Democrats must have decided somehow it works to their advantage to hold onto this bill for political leverage. We know this because they attached it to a bill the President said he would reject, and which he did reject, and now it is back on the shelf and veterans are still waiting. Americans need to know what is going on. The majority is holding onto this bill which contains money for critical new programs for veterans returning from battle.

There is still time to change course and we must. So I call on the majority to end this game. The fiscal year has come and gone without acting on this bill. Veterans Day passed without enacting the bill. Now is the time to take it off the shelf, blow the dust off, and get it to the President's desk for his signature before the Thanksgiving recess.

The majority's strategy on this bill is meant to put pressure on President Bush, but all it is doing is putting pressure on our already strained VA and delaying critical help to veterans and their families. Troops are finally coming home from Iraq. They deserve better than this when they get here, remove their uniforms, and return to our communities.

At this moment, two very good and worthy goals stand before us: funding our veterans and getting funding for our troops in harm's way. We promised them we would do this with both the Gregg and Murray amendments earlier this year. We can achieve it before the recess. Republicans are ready. I would call on the Democrats to join us in achieving these good things before the recess.

HONORING OUR ARMED FORCES

SERGEANT MATTHEW L. DECKARD

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, I rise today because a son of Kentucky has fallen. I am speaking of SGT Matthew L. Deckard of Elizabethtown, KY. He was 29 years old.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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